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Developing a Vision, Strategy and Offer for Information and Digital Literacy (IDL): A Case Study of the University of Sheffield, UK

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DEVELOPING A VISION, STRATEGY AND OFFER FOR INFORMATION AND DIGITAL LITERACY (IDL): A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD, UK.

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Abstract.

A diverse and fluid range of digital tools are increasingly being used in university libraries as students absorb, create and communicate their academic understanding. Information and digital literacy (IDL) is central to this work; blending the transferable graduate attribute of information literacy with digital tools and skills enhances the development of actively engaged students. Emerging pedagogical approaches, which are central to the University of Sheffield's Learning and Teaching Strategy, are placing students not as passive recipients of knowledge and learning in our society but as active knowledge creators. Engaging with information in a critical and ethical way allows for deeper understanding and facilitates transformative learning. The synthesis or 'remixing' of information, often using a highly visualised approach, creates and communicates new levels of understanding giving a more meaningful HE experience.

This paper will present the development of a new vision for information and digital literacy at the University of Sheffield and will outline what our distinctive offer means to current students and graduates of the University. The Library's Learning Services Unit are driving this initiative and explored national (UK) and international perspectives of IDL, before drawing on a narrative based approach to collaboratively write an IDL vision for the future. The thought leadership at Sheffield has been influenced by work undertaken by Anne Horn, in her previous role as University Librarian at Deakin University in Australia.

Collaborations with external stakeholders are now informing the development of a University wide framework for IDL, whilst our workshops and online tutorials are being co-designed and co-delivered with a team of Student Associates. This paper presents the latest developments in this work sets the scene for future initiatives in what is a highly fluid HE library environment.

Keywords.

Information and digital literacy. University Libraries. Change Management. Higher Education. Employment. Digital Citizenship.

Introduction.

Information and digital literacy (IDL) blends information literacies, with digital capabilities transcending technological skills and tools to embrace an understanding of what it means to learn, live and work in a fluid and dynamic digital age. IDL enables learners to discover and absorb information in a critically engaged manner, innovate in active pursuits of creative scholarship and demonstrate integrity by acknowledging the work of others.

It is widely acknowledged that the majority of university students are comfortable and experienced users of digital technologies, so it is perhaps somewhat surprising to learn that employers are increasingly reporting a digital skills gap amongst university graduates [JISC, 2017]. This raises questions over what opportunities students are given to transfer, develop and showcase their information and digital literacy, as part of the university experience. Sarah Knight, reporting on earlier research she undertook for JISC [2011] confirms that students are less digitally literate than we might expect. Responding to this, she says, is going to require a significant culture shift in HE, and is not simply a matter of introducing new skills and tools. Anyangwe [2012] interviewed a number of digital literacy experts for her Guardian HE Network blog post including Oxford based researcher, David White. White appears to concur with Knight, as he raises concerns about the lack of provision for digital literacy development in HE. He suggests that there are too few drivers for university staff to engage in digital literacy. Moreover, he maintains, students persistently refer to 'real' books and 'real' lectures whilst at university, thus positioning the digital as somehow less worthy or irrelevant to scholarly activities.

If students are reserving their digital skills for social rather than educational purposes, then what implications does this have for student employability? Moreover, what vital life skills are students missing out on, given that information literacy is recognised as a basic human right, in a digital world [UNESCO, 2005]. The latest NMC Horizon Report [2017] suggests that we have reason to be hopeful though, as it claims that improving the digital literacy of students should be a solvable issue for HE institutions. What is more, the report clearly states how important university libraries are in this arena.

This paper articulates how the University of Sheffield Library also believes that improving the digital literacy offer is a solvable problem for HE, and explains how we are responding to the challenge of bringing information and digital literacy mainstream, for education, employment and for active digital citizenship.

Background.

The University of Sheffield is a research led, world top 100, Russell Group University, based in Yorkshire, UK. It has a student population of almost 28,000 students (undergraduate population of slightly less than 20,000) and is organised into five main faculties. The University Library operates from four main sites, including our award winning 24/7 services in both the Information Commons and the Diamond. A new Vice-President, appointed in 2015 to develop a vision and strategy for 2016-2021, leads learning and teaching at the University. This role is supported by a number of faculty based and cross-cutting Directors for Learning and Teaching, who are tasked to take forward the three broad themes of the strategy, namely: excellence in practice, outward facing ethos and developing a flexible approach [University of Sheffield, 2016]. An image representing these three broad themes is included here in Figure 1.



Figure 1: University of Sheffield. Major themes for learning and teaching 2016-2021.

It is easy to recognise that information and digital literacy sits comfortably within the theme of developing a flexible approach to learning, given that many of our IDL resources have been created digitally, and guide students in the use of digital discovery and creation tools. It is important to note though that IDL is also intrinsic to the University's outward facing ethos. As Josie Fraser states [in Anyangwe, 2012] a major characteristic of digital literacy is that it is about social engagement. Furthermore, the Library has been proactive in taking forward the strand of excellence in practice within the department, by developing our own staff-training programme - *Let's Do Digital*. This aims to upskill library staff, to ensure that our workforce is agile, dynamic and responsive to supporting learner needs in a fluid digital world.

Alongside the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, the University Library has also developed a strategic plan [University of Sheffield Library, 2015]. Theme 1, *Student Learning and Success*, positions information and digital literacy as a core strategic library priority for the coming five years. The newly established Library Learning Services Unit is taking this strand forward, in collaboration with an internal project team and an external, university wide working group. The aim is to develop a model, framework and animation for IDL at the University of Sheffield.

Methodological approach.

It is widely recognised that information and digital literacy is fluid and dynamic and that any strategy needs to be responsive to emerging approaches and technologies. This makes it poorly suited to traditional, controlled approaches to research. We therefore decided to adopt a participatory action research (PAR) approach to our work and to blend this with the organisational change technique of appreciative inquiry (AI). This case study articulates the University of Sheffield's use of PAR within an ongoing process of AI and shows how a unique blend of approaches is allowing us to co-produce our model, animation and framework' through collaborative dialogue.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research (PAR) is a research approach that allows for social change. It is now an established methodology within education, and is of particular use when a dialogic and collaborative approach to research is required [Reason & Bradbury, 2008]. The collaborative nature of PAR allows the researcher to work with people, to discover jointly what may make a difference [Foote Whyte, Greenwood & Lazes, 2001]. Action research is often, although not exclusively, undertaken by practitioners (referred to as insiders) who operate as researchers within their own organisations.

Appreciative Inquiry

The image presented in figure 2 represents the 4D model of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is an organisational change technique developed in the States in the 1980s [Cooperrider & Avital 2004; Watkins et al 2011]. Much like participatory action research, AI values the lived experience and aims to embrace fluidity in the human condition, placing the individual narrative at the centre of organisational change. Its aim is to involve everyone in organisational change, to include the lived experience and to move organisations towards collaboratively envisioned views of the future. Appreciative Inquiry is underpinned by five broad philosophical beliefs, namely: constructionism, appreciation, positivity, simultaneity and poetics.

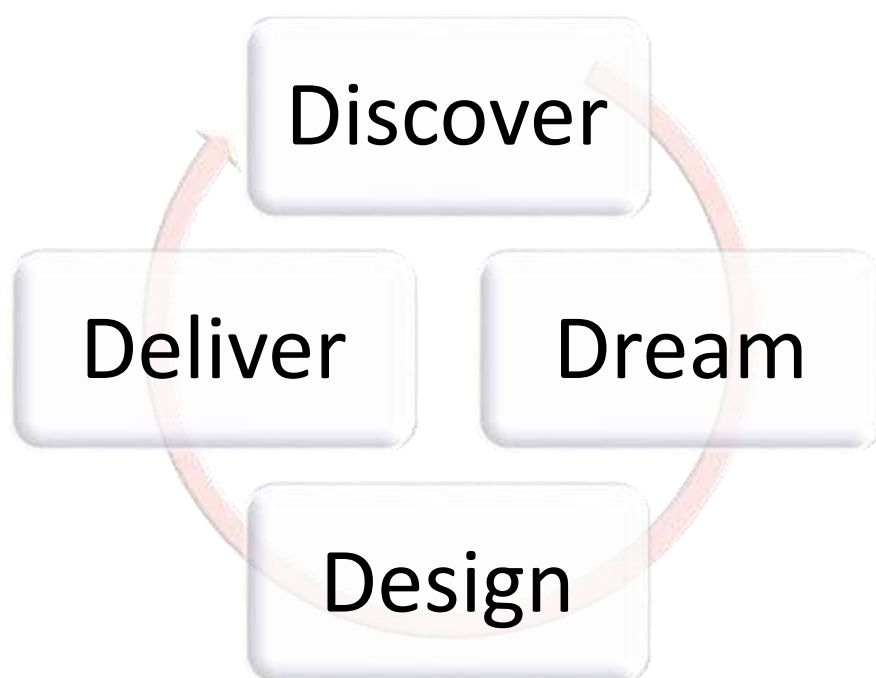


Figure 2: The 4D cycle of Appreciative Inquiry

Literature review.

In line with the ethos of participatory action research, the library team undertook to review the information and digital literacy literature together, using collaborative reference management software to share and make notes on a range of journal articles, videos, news items, conference papers, reports, frameworks and websites. We identified material serendipitously and through search databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar, using the search terms of either information literacy or digital literacy. We also looked to identify material recognising the intersection between the two concepts. Members of the Information Literacy Group (now superseded by the Library Learning Services Unit and Information and Digital Literacy Working Group) went on an away day at one of the University's conference centres to discuss what we had discovered. Broadly speaking we were

seeking to develop a depth to our understanding of IDL and to identify and review existing models and frameworks before setting a vision for the future. The aim of our reading, talking, thinking and creating was to discover more about the following two questions:

What is information and digital literacy (IDL)?
What models and frameworks have already been developed?

What is information and digital literacy?

Through our reading we recognised that there is no set definition for information and digital literacy. We noted that Bawden [2001] maintains that this lack of clarity explains why the implementation of digital literacy has been slow to develop. After discussing various options, we decided to create our own definition, as outlined at the start of this article and in the introduction to our IDL Framework [University of Sheffield Library, 2017].

What models and frameworks have already been developed for IDL?

Some of the models and frameworks we looked at as part of our review of the literature were limited to information literacy rather than intersecting information and digital literacy [ACRL, 2016; Coonan & Secker, 2011; SCONUL, 2011]. We wanted our offer to capture the intersection but still found it useful to review these, as they helped us to develop and refresh our understanding of information literacy. We particularly valued the ACRL Framework due to its philosophical approach. ANCIL offers a more practical approach which we felt would be useful to the development of case studies. We felt that the SCONUL model didn't sufficiently capture the process of creating information, which is seen as intrinsic to information and digital literacy. This however is captured in strand 9 of Coonan & Secker's ANCIL framework [2011].

The Open University have captured the intersection of IDL in their Digital and Information Literacy Framework [Open University Library 2012; Reedy, K. & Goodfellow, R. 2012] and this gives reference to the process of creating information (by including the skill of academic writing). We reviewed the work of Deakin University Library, which had been steered by Anne Horn in her previous role as Director and University Librarian at Deakin. We were inspired to create an animation after watching their own succinct and engaging short video [Deakin University Library, 2014]. Hallett (2016) emphasises that hyper-visualisation is at the heart of digital literacy and we wanted our own offer to capture the essence of this.

Educationalist Doug Belshaw's work [2012] proved to be influential to our thoughts; in particular, his eight essential elements of digital literacy provide a succinct, comprehensive and memorable framework. Belshaw maintains that a framework is there to provide structure whilst clearly stating that IDL is not a linear process. We felt inclined to agree that the seemingly contradictory position of capturing a structure whilst maintaining fluidity was necessary.

We also reviewed the JISC models of digital literacy [JISC, 2014 and JISC, 2015] which were again very useful but we felt that these needed interpreting for our local setting. In particular, we wanted to position student learning as central to our work, rather than ICT, and we felt that media literacy is intrinsic to information literacy, rather than separate to it. It was for the above reasons that we chose to devise our own IDL model and framework to reflect our own interpretations of IDL, to engage our staff and students whilst also reflecting the strategic learning and teaching priorities of our University.

The Away Day.

The team took a day out of their usual activities and agreed to dedicate a full day to working together with the aim of giving some time and space to give greater depth to our information and digital literacy work. We co-organised an outline for the day in advance, and team members took turns to facilitate the activities. This is how the day was organised:

Creativity with Lego

This was an ice breaker activity. Based on our reading the team created lego metaphors for information and digital literacy, capturing some initial visions for the future.

Reviewing the literature

We undertook paired work to discuss the readings based around the question: What is digital literacy and how does it differ from information literacy? This included the opportunity for individual thought, paired discussion, group discussion and individual reflection.

Horizon scanning

This was an activity where we looked at information and digital literacy resources from other University Libraries and from national organisations such as JISC and the ACRL.

Meme making

We ended the day by using a meme generator, to create memes of our new levels of IDL understanding. This also led to an interesting discussion with one team member raising concerns that using meme generators in our teaching might make us look like “we are trying to be down with the kids”. Others though, mentioned the work of Belshaw [2012] who, in his TEDxWarwick talk claims that memes can be used for serious study and to communicate issues of social worth.

Reflective writing

After the day we each wrote reflections on our learning, and shared these with one another using a collaborative Google Doc.

Creating the IDL model, framework, animation and offer through a process of appreciative inquiry.

We had originally anticipated creating a vision for information and digital literacy for the University Library at our away day but did not actually achieve this at such an early stage. We had initially hoped to identify IDL in our current work practices and expected to develop a new understanding that would allow us to update our current approach. However, we quickly realised that the issue was more complex than we had initially thought and that developing a strategy for IDL would involve far more than simply dropping digital tools and skills into existing practices. Rather, it required us to undertake a fundamental shift in our approach, one which embraced larger societal changes towards a postmodern information world. This, we recognised is typified by uncertainty, fluidity and dynamic and continuous change, with a shifting focus to the process of creating information. We decided to build on what we had discovered and learnt at the away day, and selected the use of the 4D model of appreciative inquiry to develop our work, due to its suitability for fluid positions of change management. We wanted to develop our understanding by stepping back from the current offer. Part of this involved us asking difficult and provocative questions about the fundamental purpose of libraries, to consider if we, as librarians believed we still had relevance in a digital age. We organised three follow up meetings to discover, envision and design our future and kept an open mind; we recognised that we ourselves needed to have authentic belief in our service if we were to expect external stakeholders and students to feel the same way. Our three meetings lasted for two hours each and were set at weekly intervals. This is what we covered:

Meeting one: Discover

In line with appreciative inquiry, we used a narrative, poetics based approach to share stories about what working in a university library means to us. We considered what had originally drawn us to librarianship and shared stories about our early memories of libraries. These, were often quite witty, and the team had fun, learning more about one another's career pathways. We asked each other several questions, including: what makes us exceptional, why do we enjoy our work and what impact do we have on the student journey? We soon realised that the purpose of libraries are not fundamentally different in a digital age, to the age of the print press or the Bic Biro. As one team member said “a pen is still a digital tool for creating new knowledge”. We started to capture words from our narratives and added them to a large sheet of A2 paper - our discovery sheet. This is what we captured:

freedom, employability, citizenship, learning, researching, identity and wellbeing.

Meeting two: Dream (envision)

At the second AI meeting we looked back at the stories we had shared the previous week and started to form our vision. We imagined the University Library in the year 2018. Our success, we agreed, had grown beyond all expectations. What does our service look like? We asked. What has made this happen? Figure 3 gives an example of one of our captured paired discussions.

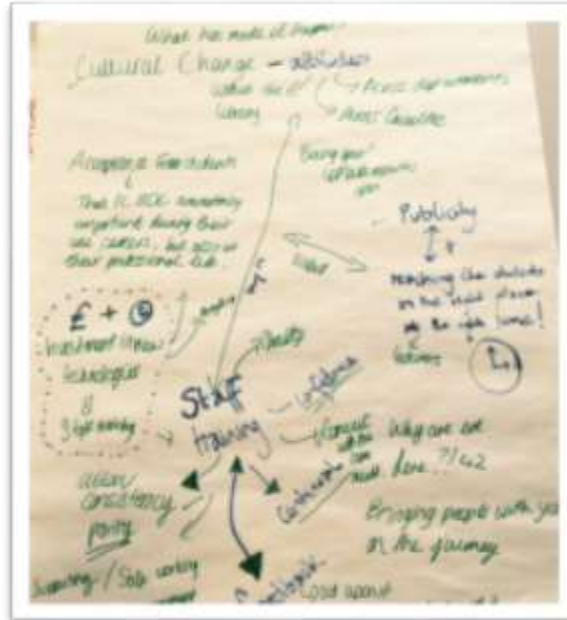


Figure 3: An example of one of our collaborative plans

Meeting three: Design

Meeting three was a more practical meeting where we consolidated our thoughts and worked in pairs to develop an 'elevator pitch' to define our offer. The Head of Library Learning Services (Vicky Grant) took the pitches away and synthesised them, to create one draft vision statement, which the team then gave feedback on, again using a collaborative Google Doc. After several iterations we finally had a vision statement that we agreed we would feel proud to have imprinted on the walls of the Information Commons:

Our inspirational libraries blend digital tools with information literacies creating outstanding sites of transformative learning for education, employment and citizenship.

Outcome: Deliver (Deploy)

The fourth stage of AI is to deliver, to implement the design. Our vision was used to form the first draft of an IDL strategy. At this stage we started to work with the University's Directors of Digital Learning and we established a Digital Commons space, within the Information Common. It was actually the Digital Commons vision that we finally imprinted on the walls, see figure 4.



Figure 4: Our Student Associates and Library Skills Advisor in the Digital Commons.

Our own vision started to form the basis of the model and framework. At this stage we identified six broad literacies which had emerged from our conversations. Of significance in these literacies is the capturing of students as information creators and communicators, positioning them as active learners, rather than passive consumers of information. We agreed that the literacies of discovering, understanding, and referencing were still vital to our offer, but wanted to place students in a position where they could elegantly absorb information rather than passively consume it. We therefore agreed that critical literacy should be given more prominence in our work and the literacy of questioning was added to our model. Perhaps of most significance though, was our decision to keep our focus on broad information literacies, rather than specific digital tools, which we decided were too fluid to be committed to a 5-year strategy. We decided that specific digital tools would be better positioned at an operational stage in our work, for example by linking to them from our online Information and Digital Skills Resource (see figure 5 for an example of one of our digital resources). Including digital tools in the series of case studies we are starting to develop, in partnership with academic and other professional service colleagues, is another positive way to include digital tools.

We secured funding to work with an external design agency to take forward our work, and our six literacies and elements of our vision statement were transformed into a simple and colourful design which can be seen here in figure 6. Following on from our internal work we established an Information and Digital Literacy Working Group, made up of librarians, academic colleagues and professional service staff, who have been tasked to write the text for the IDL staff-facing framework and a script for a student facing animated model. We are now in the process of populating the model featured in figure 6 with an accordion style framework [University of Sheffield Library, 2017].



Figure 5: A quiz from our online Information and Digital Literacy Skills Resource



Figure 6: Our model for Information and Digital Literacy

Our models are being reviewed through further collaborative dialogue, as we consult with a number of local and national IDL experts. The work is following an iterative pattern through a process of collaborative co-production. We aim to complete this work in the summer of 2017, ready to present to the University's Learning and Teaching Committee, at the start of the new academic session. We anticipate that strategic buy-in will facilitate a process of embedding IDL into the curriculum. This is proving to be timely, as the University has recently embarked on a process of curriculum review, focusing on programme level approaches to learning and teaching. We have already been successful in securing inclusion for Information and Digital Literacy in the University's newly updated Graduate Attributes [University of Sheffield, 2017].

A final and vital strand of our work has been to involve students in our PAR approach and we have been working with a team of Student Associates for Learning and Teaching (SALTs) to co-design and co-deliver our IDL offer of workshops and online tutorials. One notable resource has been a blogging video, created by one of the Student Associates in partnership with one of our Library Skills Advisors. The video, focusing on citizenship issues and featuring the blog of a Sheffield Politics student is being included in our teaching to show how a simple design and clear succinct style of writing can engage people in issues of importance to our world. In our example student blogger, Leonie Mills talks about issues of race, class and faith.

Conclusion

Our appreciative inquiry has facilitated a highly innovative and effective process of change, which has allowed us to be visionary in our thoughts and has enabled us to co-design a model, animation, framework and offer for information and digital literacy at the University of Sheffield. This has encompassed societal shifts towards a postmodern information landscape, where the focus is on the process of creating information as much as on presenting or discovering an information 'product'. Our work involved a complex transformative experience. Embracing information and digital literacy requires a shift in mind-set and in culture, rather than a simple update to existing information literacy practice.

Our collaborative approach and co-produced vision and strategy is proving to be a great motivator for the Library Learning Services Unit team who have both a depth of insight and a sense of co-ownership that now steers the operational offer. We recognise that students with high levels of information and digital literacy are well placed to be effective learners in an outward facing higher education landscape, as future leaders in a fluid and dynamic digital economy and as active digital citizens of the world.

Educationalist Paulo Freire said in his seminal work, *Pedagogy of Freedom* [1970], "the world is not complete but is always in the process of becoming". To reflect this view we placed our six literacies as verbs, to set student learning in action. It is important to state that our IDL offer is also set in action, within a continuous position of re-becoming. We continue to practice the underpinning philosophy of AI as we regularly ask questions and engage in dialogue about our work.

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